

## SAR 2017 Conference review

Conference review

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**Please Specify! Sharing Artistic Research Across Disciplines** (28 and 29th of April, 2017) at the University of the Arts Helsinki began with first-day keynote speaker Esa Kirkkopelto on a comparison between the bodily space, imaginary space and virtual space in the artistic process. Kirkkopelto described that compositional elements in various arts, i.e. their components, can be considered as bodies and that these bodies have to be conceived as essentially weightless. He drew attention to the depiction of the weightless body by referring to its representation in paintings and photography, but it was unfortunately not possible to see any images on the screen. This is because the technical preparation was for a dark and cloudy Helsinki where it was envisaged that projected images would be visible under the glass ceiling of the conference hall. Surprisingly, however, the sun was shining and thus no images at all were able to be seen during Kirkkopelto's presentation. As part of his talk, Kirkkopelto invited some of his students to take part in a demonstration of the weightless body. They performed a kind of dance by jumping in the air. The arms and legs were extremely relaxed and the performance very much conveyed the idea of floating in a swimming pool, for instance (weightlessness). According to Kirkkopelto, the weightless body in artistic phenomena is an overlap of the imaginary, scientific and religious - at least in the western context.

During the subsequent question time, the completely-full lecture hall seemed very passionate and asked a lot of questions; people seemed to want to know more and share their observations. One member of the audience asked about the relationship with falling asleep in Kirkkopelto's theory. The lady pointed out similarities with the suspension between the conscious and unconscious body in daydreaming and other forms of 'paralysed' worlds. This also led to a question regarding the experience of virtual glasses that create an artificial fantasy world for the wearer.

The second keynote speakers of the day, Victoria Pérez Royo and Vicente Arlandis, then took over. Typically, of course, there is a

### ARCHIVE

[Nr 9 \(Call\)](#)

[Nr 8 \(Call\)](#)

[Nr 7 \(Call\)](#)

[Nr 6 \(Call\)](#)

[Nr 5 \(Call\)](#)

[Nr 4 \(Call\)](#)

[Nr 3 \(Call\)](#)

[Nr 2 \(Call\)](#)

[Nr 1 \(Call\)](#)

round of applause at the beginning and end of each talk as a common gesture of respect and appreciation, but in this case, the audience was invited to applaud for a whole 28 minutes with a countdown being shown on the screen. It did feel like a very long time to clap for, but everyone came together and remained engaged. There was felt a high energy in the conference hall by the end of the performance. Most people were standing rather than sitting and many kept the applause going for the whole 28 minutes. There were some who, of course, resisted or did not participate as fully as they perhaps could have and there were a lot of interruptions with people laughing and talking, but this just heightened the noise and added to the lively atmosphere. It was rather like being at a football match, for instance. There was significance to the 28 minutes as this had been calculated to be the amount of applause one could expect over the course of the two-day conference based on the number of presentations.

After the performance, Pérez Royo and Arlandis read out a short text on the glossary of applause and related vocabulary that articulates the act of applause. I found the collectivism behind the applause fascinating; it might have begun with one person, but it very much ended up being a collective gesture. Despite clapping for 28 minutes on this occasion, it did not stop the audience from clapping before and after every other presentation during the conference.

Next was lunch which included a number of meat and vegetarian dishes, as well as some fantastic selection of bread. Many conversations took place during this time. It was great to meet colleagues from all around the world – from Australia, New York, Oslo, Stockholm, Berlin, Amsterdam, and so on. The discussion was thought provoking and I think some real friendships and networks were initiated along some of those tables.

One of the 7 parallel sessions after lunch was dedicated to the Journal for Artistic Research (JAR), which has been an outstanding platform for the promotion and distribution of artistic research. Michael Schwab, the Editor-in-chief of JAR, alongside some of its editorial board, presented the process of submission and responded to the audience's questions. There were questions regarding the state of artistic research generally and how often artistic researchers considered the need for distribution of their work on platforms such as JAR. In particular, there was discussion about the most suitable time in the research process to seek publication. A large number of members of the audience articulated resistance towards seeking publication due to a perceived lack of readiness in their work.

The session continued by referring to the form of publication in JAR known as 'exposition', which is essentially about presenting one's artistic research. The multi-disciplinary nature of international artistic research was discussed, as JAR encourages submission from the fields of architecture, music, fine art, and performance, among others. There was also discussion about the possibility of expanding JAR into a more multi-lingual platform that could accommodate the 20 most widely-spoken languages in the world. JAR believes that a multi-lingual element to the platform is crucial to increase readership. The word 'publication' was also evaluated within the medium of online publishing.

Sean Lowry's and Simone Douglas's keynote presentation was the

final presentation of the day and referenced two parallel projects, an exhibition and a conference on modes of curating and sharing artistic research. 'Project Anywhere' is an international exhibition model that utilises the type of peer review process typically endorsed by a referenced journal, and 'Anywhere and Elsewhere' is a biennial conference held at Parsons, The New School in New York, and explores art at the outermost limits of location-specificity.

The thematic context of the conference became exceedingly clear as the presentations continued. ***Please Specify! Sharing Artistic Research Across Disciplines*** identified the micro-politics involved in representation, artistic research and dissemination, whether in relation to a specific space (physical, material or metaphorical, as in Kirkkopelto's presentation); or in relation to a specific time, duration, collectivism or linguistic connotation that modifies a gesture; or in terms of the micro-politics involved within mobility and cross-disciplinary experimentations in artistic research, as Lowry and Douglas described.

The first day of the conference ended with a reception at Helsinki City Hall where we were glamorously and hospitably hosted by the City of Helsinki. The majority of participants I think saw a great desire to expand artistic research in Helsinki.

## **Day 2.**

Hans-Jörg Rheinberger was the first keynote speaker on the second day of the conference, reflecting on the experimental epistemic quality between arts and science. Rheinberger defined a form of constellation, or rather a diagram for the history of epistemic things, to extend methods for knowing rather than to simply grasp knowing. He referred to the relation of technology in the production of artistic practice, as well as the resilience of material. The basic argument he stressed was that, just as science cannot finally be understood on the basis of the structure of its accomplished theories, arts as well are not understandable on the basis of the structure of their products. On the laboratory and discursive qualities of artistic research, Rheinberger emphasised that they both co-exist and complement one another in a continuous manner. The question remains, at what stage do you decide to become part of the collective? What role does the aesthetic effect/aesthetic objects play in our decision making to become part of a collective?

Rheinberger highlighted the temporary stage of artistic research through its progress which is unfinished and yet ready to become accessible to others. Parallel observations which came up during the question time referred to the stage of redundancy - how and in what circumstances may this occur? Rheinberger's presentation was accompanied by a series of visual aids, but, again, the audience were unable to see these due to the issue with the unexpected natural light in the conference space.

Catherine Laws followed as the second keynote speaker of the day with her performative presentation titled 'This Is ... Is It?'. The presentation began with a recording of a woman's voice whispering in the distance and continued for a few minutes. The recording then stopped and Laws started to play the piano live on stage. The music was a common melody, but unexpectedly her hands continued to play the rhythm of the song in the air as if she were

following the notes into the sky. This followed with a form of dance of her fingers; her eyes also followed the movement as if the notes were emanating from her fingers and fading out into the air. The repetition of this gesture began to deliver a message; it seemed that the emphasis was no longer the music, but the space in between Laws' notes.

A new imaginary constellation took shape as if Laws was drawing a line from one side of the piano keys to the other and then to the sky. The movement back and forth, and the imaginary drawing formed or shaped an invisible curve in the air. The combination of the sonic and physical experiences was strongly pronounced as it included the instrument, the composer and the spectator.

Laws stopped playing the piano or, in my eyes, stopped drawing her imaginary drawing in the air, and began to read her paper. She emphasised the idea that a performance seems to say 'this is....' but that it never really is, is it? I actually found her paper and performance contradictory. The performance was very much the voice of an individual confidently expressed, but the paper was filled with too many quotations. It was not easy to hear the author's voice in it and somehow we were lost in the midst of all these references. A crucial question came up during the discussion and that was, to what degree can one stage a performance and yet, at the same time, articulate a lecture - how and in what way can these two elements be combined so that they overlap naturally and enable the presenter to shift between them without disturbing the spectator?

To end the review, I shall refer to the most interesting parallel session titled 'Figuring the Body: on Qualitative Specificity (How-ness) Within Artistic Research'. This section was conceived by Emma Cocker, Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Grell. Their experimental research referred to the 'when-ness' and 'where-ness' in artistic research, and the modality of 'how', 'exploration' and 'randomness' through a series of experimental drawings. Gansterer explained that 'how-ness' gave birth to 'what-ness' and 'why-ness'. The creative exploration of their project was symbolic yet reciprocal. It was a figure of spiral momentum with resolution and temporary closing.

The rhythm with which the process was narrated was a form of music in itself, I believe. The question that arose was, to what extent did spontaneity and planning play a role in the project? The relation between experimentation that was shown in their video presentation (i.e. punctuation marks such as Comma) was discussed, as was the relation to deviation of scoring and notation, and choreography; in fact, the history of scoring was also unfolded. As part of their presentation, Gansterer and Grell distributed their published book as an outcome of their experimental research titled 'Choreographic Figures: Deviations from the Line'.

In a few words, the key highlights of the conference were the notion of specificity in artistic research, the experimentation and uncertainties, the collaborative nature of the research, the collective and yet isolating pattern, and the trace of progress and evaluation by the use of constellation, as well as the relation between artistic practice and scientific projects. The only missing part of the conference was perhaps a session where a panel of selected speakers could discuss the key elements from each day's presentations.

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/292240/331420>

<http://www.projectanywhere.net/conference/>

<http://sreshtaritpremnath.com>

<http://www.newschool.edu/parsons/faculty.aspx?id=4d6a-6335-4f54-4132>

<http://m11.manifesta.org/en/artist/bjorn-kuhn-anna-romanenko>

<http://megansmith.ca/mls30193241/air-wing-travelling-to-the-frontier-of-creative-practice-using-new-technologies/>

<http://www.uniarts.fi/uniartstv/victoria-perez-royo-figures-utopia>

<http://liminaldome.com>

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